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The C-E Interpreter as
the Exporter of Chinese Culture

作为文化传播者的中英口译员

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Synopsis

Today's world is witnessing a great surge in cross-linguistic and cross-cultural interactions as never before. However, the interactions among various languages and cultures, those between the post-colonist West and the post-colonized East in particular, are nowhere near the balance. This unbalanced situation is marginalizing many eastern cultures and putting them in a disadvantaged status in relation to their western counterparts. To enable all peoples and cultures to be equally represented in the process of globalization instead of letting one dominate and others be marginalized, balanced linguistic and cultural interactions are essential. Based on the belief that language constitutes the most essential part of culture and "language expresses, embodies and symbolizes cultural reality", the author spends due efforts discussing culture at the linguistic level. The paper points out that unbalanced intellectual interaction between Chinese and English has long been a fact, with the English language and culture having made overwhelmingly greater inroads into and remolding impact on its Chinese counterpart. If unchanged, this unbalanced interaction will not be conducive to the well being of both languages and cultures as it otherwise could be. The mission to change this unfavorable situation has so far been by and large entrusted with professionals in translation, especially literary translation in that literary works are usually believed to be more culturally charged. With the world getting smaller at a pace it has never been before, the exchanges between different peoples are becoming more extensive and frequent, and more importantly, in more direct forms, which has placed interpreting in the foreground as an important way of facilitating cultural as well as linguistic exchanges. The situation can be said to be true of Sino-English exchanges in particular. Chinese-English interpreters are thus placed under the spotlight. In opposition to the traditional view that expects no more responsibility than basic informational conveyance from C-E interpreters, the author argues for their increasingly important role as the exporter of Chinese culture in order to contribute to the balance in the linguistic and cultural exchanges between China

and the West, which will in turn contribute to the well being of the on-going cultural mergence.

Key Words: unbalanced cultural exchanges, C-E interpreter, cultural exporter

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摘要

当今世界的全球化浪潮势不可挡,伴随着各民族经济一体化趋势,语言文化的交流融合也是不可避免的。但遗憾的是,恰如经济交流之不平等,文化之交流也是不平衡的。长久以来,西方文化,尤其是英语文化,借助其强大的经济辐射力与渗透力,在与东方各族文化的交流中一直处于主动地位,对东方文化的输出远大于反方向的输入。英语文化与中国文化的交流尤其如此。纵观近代历史背景下的中英语言文化交流,不平衡是显而易见的。不平衡的交流不管对强势文化还是弱势一方都有害无益。弱势文化被误解,扭曲,其精髓无法得以宣扬,而强势文化由于总是处于输出的一段,不仅不可避免的产生自我中心的心理态势,而且长此以往,必然会营养不良。各文化均是各民族长久以来与生存环境交互作用下衍生发展起来的旨在辅助自身生存系统工具,一种文化就代表一种探索世界的方式,代表一种人与人以及人与自然相处的方式,都有很多值得别的文化学习借鉴的地方。而不平衡的文化交流,致使独尊一种文化,边缘化别文化,显然是不利于整个人类社会的,因此要予以矫正。

作为文化交流的主要载体之一,翻译无疑是矫正中英文化不平衡交流的利器。长期以来,很多翻译理论家以及实践家均大力倡导在中英笔译,尤其是文学翻译中,采用直译等策略,以期将中国语言文化的特点原本地输入英语文化。

在当今全球化背景下,跨文化交流的形式日渐广泛而直接,口译作为交流辅助工具的作用越来越重要。因此,本文作者认为,在当前背景下,传播文化已经不是笔译的专利了;为了促使中英文化交流恢复平衡,中英口译员也需要扮演一个很重要的角色:中国文化输出者。本文旨在讨论在中英口译员在口译过程中应该采取何种策略,以期在保障交流的前提下更好的传播中国文化。

关键词: 文化交流失衡; 中英口译员; 文化输出

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Chapter I Introduction

1.1 Background and purpose of the research

The thesis is largely built on the widely observed fact that English has become a world language and is actively interacting with the local languages in an unbalanced manner. English, as it began spreading across the world at the end of 16th century, had only 5 million speakers, and now it is being spoken by an estimated number of 1.5 billion people from all over the world, mostly non-native. (颜治强, 2002: 53) Kachru (Kachru, 1982) paints a picture of the English spreading in terms of three circles, i.e. the *Inner Circle*, including the 5 countries that speak English as native language; the *Outer Circle*, which comprises most of the previous British-colonized countries using English at least as one of their official languages; and the *Extending Circle*, which is made up of many nations where English learning is on a sharp upward curve for practical communication purposes.

English, as a dominant language, has never interacted with the local languages on an equal footing; it has been acting more like an invader than an equivalent. English, in its course of spreading, has had great influence on the local languages and their cultures, the Chinese language and culture for one, for many reasons to be elaborated on later. This is evidenced by numerous lexical and grammatical changes that the Chinese language has undergone. However, it is not the same case the other way around. China, as categorized by Kachru in the *Extending circle* in English's spread pattern, has been far from exerting an equal impact on English. In comparison, the *Outer Circle* has managed to do more. (颜治强, 2002:92) This has created a unbalanced linguistic and cultural exchanges between the Chinese and the English, which is a bane to both participants as well as the global culture in formation.

The author therefore argues for measures to be taken to redress the imbalance. Acting on the belief that unbalanced translation has been a major contributor to the overall unbalanced situation between the two languages and cultures, the author

argues for C-E interpreters, who are coming under the spotlight in the present global context, to take up a more significant role. The overall principle the author argues to be applied to translation practice is the idea of *translate it as it is*, which is to be further discussed with details later.

The purpose of the paper is to: highlight the unbalanced situation and the urgency of redressing it; explore guidance as well as specific measures to be taken by C-E interpreters to achieve the purpose; explore the principles to guide the training of C-E interpreters so as to best serve the purpose.

1.2 Definitions of some terms

There are a few key terms in the article that it is best to define in the beginning to avoid potential misunderstanding.

1.2.1 Culture and its relationship with language

Culture is a key word in this thesis, as it is the major front where battles are being fought in translation practice. And the idea of *translating it as it is* also at the linguistic level stems from the belief in the inseparable relationship between language and culture.

What is culture then? The definition of culture has never been unanimously agreed on; however, one thing is for sure: the definitions, different as they are, have all become broader than before. They have expanded to cover a much wider range than before. (苏新春, 2006) Four levels are at least covered: material achievements; social system; behaviors and customs; language and thinking mode. (刘宓庆, 1998).

This thesis focuses on the last two dimensions, as they are easier to be shaped by translation, the focal point of this thesis.

Language is bound up with culture in multiple and complex ways, as Claire Kramsch (Kramsch, 2000: 3) points out, language expresses cultural reality; language embodies cultural reality; and language symbolizes cultural reality.

Language is far more than a tool used for communications; it underlies and

shapes the thinking mode of its users. The well-known Sapir-Whorf hypothesis argues that language defines the way a person behaves and thinks because the languages we speak and our thoughts are somehow interwoven, and that all peoples are equally being affected by the confines of their languages. Sapir and Whorf might have gone a little bit too far in claiming too big a role for language to play, however, language does reflect and affect our thinking and behavior to a considerable extent that it deserves close scrutiny on the parts of translators.

Therefore, to translate the language as it is is by and large to translate the thinking of the speakers of the language. And to translate the Chinese language as it is means to retain the unique characteristics of the Chinese language, such as grammar which is believed to reflect the thinking mode of the Chinese speakers.

1.2.2 The West

The thesis mentions the idea of the West from time to time as an reference to mostly the countries that share English as the native language, rather than to the whole western hemisphere of the earth. Likewise, the term “western culture” is sometimes used for the same reference.

1.2.3 C-E Interpreter

C-E interpreters, in the broad sense of the term, refer to the interpreters who undertake interpreting practice from Chinese to English, be they Chinese natives or non-Chinese natives, professional or amateur. Due to the special context of this thesis, C-E interpreters refer to mostly the Chinese natives who specialize in C-E interpreting practice. The reason is two fold. On the one hand, there are very few non-Chinese nationals who have sufficient proficiency in the Chinese language and culture to qualify for the job. On the other hand, only the Chinese nationals are motivated to dedicate themselves to promoting their own culture.

1.2.4 Interpret it as it is

The idea of “Interpret it as it is” is the guiding principle on strategies for C-E interpreters to take to fulfill the role as the exporter of the Chinese culture. It essentially comes from the old and controversial idea of literal translation and shares very much the same beliefs. The author chooses a different expression other than the term “literal translation” to lay a focus on interpreters, as the term has previously been basically talked about in relation to written translation.

1.3 Organization of the thesis

The thesis is made up of 5 chapters.

Chapter one serves as an introduction to the whole thesis, explaining the background and the purpose and putting forward the basic idea of the thesis. Chapter one also explains certain key terms used in the thesis.

Chapter two ushers in the problem, i.e. the unbalanced Sino-English cultural exchanges and supports the argument with substantial facts. The author offers a multi-fold explanation for the current situation and discusses negative impact the situation is incurring on the well being of the participating cultures and the world culture on a whole.

Chapter three seeks to lay a theoretical foundation for the thesis, resorting to the German skopos theory. The skopos theory essentially argues for translation to be viewed as purposeful act, and different purposes on the part of different agents in the translation practice to be taken into account. The theory fits well with the role the thesis seeks to place on the C-E interpreters’ shoulders. The author argues that translation is the major battle field for the whole campaign of redressing the unbalanced situation to take place. The author also shares some critical thoughts on Nida’s theory of dynamic equivalence and the French interpretive approach from a cultural perspective.

In chapter four, the author seeks to lay down a guiding principle for C-E

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